

## Message Text

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ACTION SIL-01

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08  
INR-07 LAB-04 NSAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03  
NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 HA-05  
NEA-10 /100 W  
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O 311727Z JAN 78  
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
TO AMEMBASSY TUNIS IMMEDIATE  
SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4575  
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY ROME  
USMISSION GENEVA

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USEEC

E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: ICFTU, ELAB, TS  
SUBJ: ICFTU PRESSING FOR RELEASE OF UGTT LEADERS

REF: BRUSSELS 1819 (NOTAL)

1. THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU) HAS MOUNTED A CAMPAIGN TO PRESSURE THE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT TO FREE UGTT LEADERS NOW UNDER ARREST, ACCORDING TO ICFTU GENERAL SECRETARY OTTO KERSTEN. IN A BRIEFING FOR FOUR BRUSSELS-BASED LABOR ATTACHES (U.S., DUTCH, BRITISH, AND CANADIAN) JAN. 31, KERSTEN SAID THAT NOT ONLY THE ICFTU, BUT AFFILIATES IN GERMANY, FRANCE, SCANDANAVIA, AND ELSEWHERE HAVE SENT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA CABLES PROTESTING THE ARREST OF HABIB ACHOUR, UGTT GENERAL SECRETARY, AND TEN OF HIS EXECUTIVE  
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COMMITTEE MEMBERS.

2. KERSTEN SAID THAT ICFTU ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY JOHN VANDERVEKEN, NOW IN TUNIS, HAS AN APPOINTMENT WITH PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA LATE AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 31. VANDERVEKEN'S MISSION IS NOT ONLY TO ASSESS THE SITUATION BUT ALSO TO PRESS FOR RELEASE OF THE ARRESTED UNIONISTS,

KERSTEN SAID. THE ICFTU MAY LATER SEND A TOP-LEVEL LABOR DELEGATION, INCLUDING DGB PRESIDENT HEINZ OTTO VETTER, TO TUNIS, ACCORDING TO KERSTEN.

3. KERSTEN EMPHASIZED THAT ACHOUR AND THE UGTT IN PLANNING THEIR GENERAL STRIKE SPECIFICALLY STIPULATED THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS OR ANY OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR VIOLENCE OR CLASHES WITH GOVERNMENT FORCES. KERSTEN ALLEGED, MOREOVER, THAT WHEN VIOLENCE BROKE OUT ACHOUR PROMPTLY DISOWNED IT, AND THAT FURTHERMORE ON ONE OCCASION ACHOUR PERSONALLY CALLED THE INTERIOR MINISTER TO ALERT HIM TO A REPORT THAT A UNION HEADQUARTERS WOULD BE RANSACKED AND TO ASK FOR POLICE PROTECTION--A WARNING WHICH, ACCORDING TO KERSTEN, THE INTERIOR MINISTER IGNORED. RIOTERS WERE LARGELY YOUNG PEOPLE, NOT WORKERS, KERSTEN SAID.

4. MOST OF KERSTEN'S BRIEFING WAS A CHRONOLOGY OF ALREADY KNOWN DETAILS OF HIS UNSUCCESSFUL TRIP TO TUNIS LAST WEEK TO MEDIATE THE UGTT-GOVERNMENT CONFLICT. KERSTEN PRECEDED THE CHRONOLOGY WITH "TWO GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT A DIFFICULT SITUATION":

A. THAT "POLITICALLY SPEAKING WE HAVE TO SEE THAT TUNISIA REMAINS AS IT HAS BEEN--A LIBERAL, WESTERN-ORIENTED FORCE IN THE ARAB WORLD;" AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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B. THAT "SUCH A LIBERAL SOCIETY CANNOT EXIST IF THERE IS NO FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION."

5. WHILE CALLING PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA A LIBERAL FORCE WITHIN GOT, KERSTEN CRITICIZED HIM FOR REJECTING KERSTEN'S SUGGESTION PRIOR TO THE GENERAL STRIKE THAT THE GOVERNMENT REOPEN A DIALOGUE WITH ACHOUR AND THE UGTT IN ORDER TO AVERT THE CONFRONTATION.

6. IN HIS COMMENTS HERE, KERSTEN RECOGNIZED THAT PROBABLY "THERE ARE SOME ELEMENTS IN THE UGTT STEERED" BY THE LIBYANS AND THE ALGERIANS AGAINST PRESENT GOT, BUT ADDED THAT THESE ELEMENTS ARE A SMALL MINORITY.

7. IN SEPARATE COMMENTS TO USEC LABOR ATTACHE, ENZO FRISO, ICFTU STAFFER WHO ACCOMPANIED KERSTEN, SAID THAT BOTH SIDES IN THE TUNISIAN CONFLICT "UNDERESTIMATED EACH OTHER"--ACHOUR DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD DARE ARREST HIM, AND GOT THOUGHT IT COULD CONTROL SITUATION WITHOUT VIOLENCE. FRISO SAID FURTHER THAT, ALTHOUGH ACHOUR HAS MADE MISTAKES, HE RETAINS THE LOYALTY

OF LARGE PARTS OF TUNISIAN POPULATION, AND THAT WORKERS  
WILL STRONGLY RESIST DESTOURIAN PARTY EFFORTS TO IMPOSE  
A NEW LEADERSHIP ON UGTT. HINTON

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## Message Attributes

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**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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**Decaption Date:** 20 Mar 2014  
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**TAGS:** ELAB, TS, ICFTU  
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